

SCATTERED PEARLS

ON ISLAMIC EDUCATION



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A Prophetic Way of Teaching

by Muhammad Haq (Haq)

The traditions of the Prophet ﷺ, namely in the form of sayings (*hadith*) as well as being a source of law and religious guidance, also holds many other meanings and lessons, available to those who read it analytically. This is alluded to in the following Hadith:

“May Allah brighten [the face of] a person who hears a hadith from us, and reports it as he heard it, for perhaps the one whom the hadith is reported to, is more understanding than the one who reported it to them.”
(Tirmidhi)

In this short article, we'll explore a hadith with this in mind. However, at the outset, it is important to remember that this is ‘a’ prophetic method, not ‘the’ only and exclusive prophetic way, as the Prophet ﷺ often would address those present according to their intellectual capacity. As he said:

Treat people according to their ranks/ability/status
(Abu Dawud)1

Thus a philosopher or an academic will be engaged in different discussion than a simple nomad.

From Universals to Particulars

A man migrated (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina because he intended to marry a woman called Umm Qays. The woman said she will accept his proposal only if he migrated. Thus he became known as ‘the migrator to Umm Qays’. The man then went to ask the Prophet ﷺ about the status of his action, will he get the reward for making the hijra? To this, the Prophet ﷺ replied,

“Actions are by their intentions and every man (or woman) shall have what they intended. Thus he whose migration was for Allah and His messenger ﷺ, his migration was for Allah and His messenger, and he whose migration was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his migration was for that for which he migrated.” (Bukhari)

The Prophet ﷺ first stated a universal (*kulli* or *jinse*):

“Actions are by their intentions and every man (or woman) shall have what they intended.”

He then applied this universal to two general categories (*naw'*): Doing something for the hereafter, and doing something for this world.

He then placed the actual case in hand, i.e. migrating for the purpose of marriage, under the ‘mundane’ category (*'ayn*):

Universal	General	Particular
	Hereafter	
“Actions are by their intentions”	Mundane	Marriage

One of the strengths of this approach is that you not only answer the specific question under discussion, but also equip the questioner with the knowledge necessary to answer any other question of a similar nature. Furthermore, your questioner benefits from the fact that you expose your line of reasoning.

This Prophetic method is utilised by many Islamic jurists when they, like the Prophet ﷺ, answer questions. Moreover, as Imam Ibn al-Qayyim mentions, it allows breadth for the jurist to answer questions by including additional, but relevant, knowledge. By extension, it is completely acceptable for a Muslim to ask the jurist or mufti for his reasoning when the latter issues a legal response (*fatwa*), and the jurist should not be offended by this, as that would indicate he deems himself above the Prophetic method.

This approach of moving from generals to particulars is also employed in the science of *Qawā'id Fiqhiyya* (legal maxims), which unfortunately is not studied except by dedicated students of the Islamic sciences, more specifically those who are training to issue legal rulings (*fatwa*).

Lastly, it is important for us to note that this is not something jurists or scholars employ just to show intellectual prowess as is sometimes alluded to. As well as having a discourse which accommodates everyone, it is also vital that we appreciate and keep alive our intellectual rigour and sophistication. We need not ‘dumb everything down’, all in the name of accessibility. Sometimes, the onus is on the student, to ‘up her game’.

Employing This Method in Our Discourses

Of course, this method is probably not the easiest to grasp at first, and thus it needn’t be used all the time, however, to be better equipped at ‘internalising’ the logic of the *Shari'a* (Islamic law), it is indispensable. This will allow a person to acquire a new level of understanding, one that is deeper than simple do’s and don’ts. This eventually leads a person to grasp the aims and purposes (*maqāsid*) of the *Shari`a*, at least to some degree.

The Common Method

The more common method when teaching Islamic law and ethics, however, is to cover each issue individually

with its ruling, i.e. the particulars only. This is due to its expediency and the fact that it equips people to immediately deal with the issue at hand and know the *Shar'ia* stance towards it. This is also a method employed by our Prophet ﷺ.

The Arqam Effect: From Reading the Qur'an to Action

by Yusuf Rios (Abul Hussein)

Those familiar with the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (peace be upon him) are versant with the story of a young man named *Arqam*. Arqam played an instrumental role in the unfolding of the history of the Arabian Peninsula. Despite his key role in history, he is noted in the books of Prophetic biography to be a discreet person in Meccan society. In contemporary Western terms Arqam functioned as a:

1. *self-less philanthropist furthering the cause of a brotherly society*
2. *non-profit organization working for the betterment of society*

Upon a close read of the biography of the Prophet ﷺ we learn that Arqam's role in history was more than non-profits and philanthropists. Arqam's decision

functioned as an institution devoid of bureaucracy in impact and its effect was so profound that it moved the direction of history. The educational space in Arqam's home communicated a qualitative education so profound and thorough that it affected personal, intellectual and historical change. It was so transformative an experience that the whole of the Arabian Peninsula was reshaped. A disruption of the old psychological order was brought about by transforming the attitude, thinking, and practices of the students of the *Qur'an*.

One of the fundamental verses that promoted such a transformation based on a wholesome understanding of community life was revealed in Madina and is found in the Chapter of the *Qur'an* entitled *Ma'ida*. It reads as follows:

"And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah ; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty." (5:2)

Imam al-Qurtubi al-Maliki, commenting on this verse, said: "*It is a command for all the creation to assist one another in (taqwa) righteousness and (birr) piety, which means they must help one another.*"

Imam al-Mawardi ash-Shafi said: “*Allah (exalted is He) has called on people to help one another and married cooperation to righteousness and piety.*” He further stated that “*in righteousness there is Allah’s pleasure and in piety is the pleasure of the people and he who has gained Allah’s pleasure and that of people is happy and fully blessed.*”

Imam Ibn Atiya al-Maliki said: “*Piety is engaging that which is obligated and recommended of action whereas righteousness is restricted to performing obligations.*”

The term piety in the sense found in the Qur'an, in this verse, transcends the basic command to righteousness or God-consciousness. This is so because piety enjoins doing more than what is commanded of goodness and staying away from what is ugly and prohibited (*haram*) - this is God-consciousness (*taqwa*). Rather, the commitment to piety is more than just personal spiritual development as it unfolds in doing what is obligated and staying away from the prohibited; it demands doing acts of goodness which are not obligated. Piety (*birr*) adds great value to society because it carries the human being to a standard of excellence that is not a matter of keeping to the *do's* and *don'ts* of Islam. God-consciousness is a fundamental level of spiritual maturity, but piety is a call to grow beyond the basics of

fearing for one's well being and desiring what is best. For this reason the commitment to piety has a social component

The group studying at the home of Arqam did not secretly meet to plan a violent overthrow of the system, nor did they study a manifesto that would teach them a program to enshrine their newly founded party. The environment in this period of Islamic history was very hostile to women, the weak, the stranger, and the poor. The strong man governed and the sword was always near. It was far from the state of nature that honored the human being and far from the rule of law—rather, it was the law of barbarism and ignorance celebrated through poetry and occasional hospitality. Despite this social fact and environmental challenge the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ did not falter. It was in the abode of Arqam that the early Muslims found a safe house to imbibe the teachings of the Qur'an and the character necessary to transform society from the core. If it was power they were after, they had a chance to march into Mecca and conquer it after they achieved independence in Madina. If it was wealth they aimed at, they had the ability to plunder to their delight. What they were after was a life worth living.

Rather what they learned at Arqam's home was an institution of education that taught that the poor, the rich, the stranger, the woman and the non-Muslim all had inherent rights that are God-given and that faith and reason are not to fall prey to superstition. The Arqam effect was so profound in impact that individuals who graduated from the institution were later key individuals who served to construct the society of Madina. Madina, as many of us know, was the first State in the world to be founded on a constitution. They became corner stones to society and its major benefactors. The lesson of the Qur'an they imbibed was that to build society is an obligation and to uphold justice and law is crucial to society's survival. The education they received was a Qur'anic education and, further, a human education.

Fetullah Gulen states: "A system of education without a clearly defined target and purpose will only serve to confuse future generations. We have to be careful that our youth is taught the proper material in an effective manner to ensure that they are actually learning rather than simply becoming conduits of data."¹ Arqam, as a youth, learned more than just the fundamentals for a successful career. He learned how to be a functional part

of society, how to care for society, and how to build society.

Lessons on citizenship are not enough to bring about a just social life. An understanding of Islam bent on attaining power to wield it like a sword will not bring about a just social order. A life devoted to spiritual practices and neglect of the material world is not enough to bring about a change in the madness of the world. A booming economic upturn is also not enough.

What is needed is a transformation of perspective, a cultivation of will, a suppression of ego, and a deep commitment to the teachings of the Qur'an. The students of the school of Arqam eventually moved on to graduate. When they graduated, they renewed society, for it was through the patient suffering in Mecca and the studious effort to understand the Qur'an. While the world was in chaos, they eventually developed the qualities necessary to build Madinan society and then return to build Mecca. Study of the Qur'an must be accompanied by a spirit searching for solutions for humanity's spiritual and intellectual ailments as well as its social ills. Change is not only personal, but it is in light of social transformation. What do we need to change in ourselves to make society better? That

question is the question we must ask when we read the Qur'an.

1. <http://en.fgulen.com/recent-articles/4296-what-generations-expect-from-education> [←]

Three Steps of Knowledge

by Shazia Ahmad

The great scholar Sufyan ath-Thawri (may God be pleased with him) is reported to have said,

“Knowledge is three hand-spans: the first breeds arrogance, the second breeds humility, and in the third, you realize you know nothing.”

When one first embarks on religious studies, one may feel a heady sense of confidence at gaining proficiency in the Islamic sciences that may lead one to arrogance. With further study and time, however, one may begin to realize that issues that once seemed so clear-cut are actually more complex than one initially believed, and that there is great depth in matters one first perceived as shallow. This is the second “hand-span” that Sufyan ath-Thawri refers to which engenders a sense of humility in a person and reverence for others of more knowledge.

As one continues one their path of study, one may realize that no matter how deeply one delves into knowledge and how much expertise one attains, one is limited in one's abilities, and it is only Allah *subhanahu wa ta`ala* (exalted is He) who has full and all-encompassing knowledge. Any number divided by the infinite is zero; in the same way, any knowledge we have attained, in comparison to Allah's perfect and complete knowledge, is in reality nothing. Realizing one's own deficiencies in light of Allah's perfection and His infinite knowledge brings one's heart to a beautiful state of intense humbleness and devotion. This is the third "hand-span" and the state in which one has truly internalized what Allah (swt) says in the Qur'an in Surah Yusuf:

"We raise in degrees (of knowledge) whom We will, but over every possessor of knowledge is One [more] Knowing." (12:76)

True Knowledge

By Chad Earl

Last week I finished the last of my nine written exams to enter Al-Azhar. I had been preparing for these exams for months, but as the time drew near I realized that I hadn't put as much time into preparing for them as I should have, and felt a serious race against the clock was underway. My wife, an Egyptian who majored in Arabic in college, helped me tremendously with the four tests related to Arabic: *Sarf* (Morphology), *Nahwa* (Grammar), *Balaagha* (Eloquence), and *Adab wa Nosoos* (Literature). With her help I was able to cover the most important items for these exams before 'exam week', and reviewed each subject the night before taking its exam.

One night, as we were reviewing for *Sarf* and *Nahwa*, my wife was reading quickly through a portion of the book that we had covered before but had completely escaped my mind. As she

was reading through it, sounding more like Chinese than Arabic to my mind as I struggled to recall the material, I felt increasingly frustrated and overwhelmed. I became short-tempered, and angrily told her, “Slow down! You’re not helping me by reading it like that!”

Of course she was upset by my words, as she was only trying to help. As we continued reviewing, a strong feeling of regret came over me, and I started crying uncontrollably to the point I couldn’t even speak for five or ten minutes. My wife, confused and worried, kept asking what was wrong.

What *was* wrong? This knowledge that we work hard to understand is supposed to bring us closer to Allah *subhanahu wa ta`ala* (exalted is He) and make us *better* people, both in our relationship to Him and with His creation. As the Prophet ﷺ (peace be upon him) said:

“The most complete believer regarding his faith is the one who has the best *khuluq* (character, manners, behavior), and the best amongst you are those who are the best to their wives.”¹

After working so hard over the past weeks preparing for exams, focusing so much on getting good results, I realized that I had forgotten my main goal. The purpose of seeking knowledge is to try and understand my faith, to get closer to Allah (swt), and to apply this sacred knowledge so that it will benefit me in this life and the next, as well as my community. True knowledge improves one's character and dealing with others, as this small incident with my wife helped me to remember and take a lesson from.

"And seek aid in steadfast patience and prayer: yet this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the humble in spirit," (Qur'an 2:45).²

O Allah, teach us that which benefits us, and benefit us with that which you have taught us, and give us an increase in knowledge and deeds that are accepted by You. Guide us, and guide others by us, and make us a cause for those who will be guided!

1. On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, Reported by Imam At-Tirmidhi (#1162) who said its *sanad* (chain) is Hasan Sahih, as well as Imam Ahmed in his Musnad (2/ 450, 472 with a good chain according the Shaykh Shu'ayb Al-Arna'oot). It is

also *hadith* (record) #628 in Riyaadh As-Saaliheen.
[✉]

2. The translation of this verse is taken from Muhammad Asad's translation, May Allah have Mercy upon him. I have changed the word "and" to the word "yet" which may or may not bring it closer to the intended meaning, Allah knows best. [✉]

11 Anchors for the Beginner

by Suhaib WebbSeptember

Shaykh ‘Ali Rajab al-Salihi’ al-Azhari’s Approach Towards Building a Student:

Shaykh ‘Ali was from the great scholars of al-Azhar. He wrote that 11 sciences (‘UlOOM) should be mastered by anyone who truly wanted to start on a path towards becoming from the people of knowledge and da’wah (the call to Islam). This curriculum is still taught in al-Azhar (though modified with some short comings and some improvements), forming the basis of my own approach towards learning and teaching.

The 11 Subjects that a Serious Student should Focus on:

- Logic
- Theology
- Usul al-Fiqh
- Fiqh

- ‘Ilm al-Ma’ani (rhetoric)
- ‘Ilm al-Bayan (rhetoric)
- ‘Ilm al-Bad’i (rhetoric)
- Grammar
- Morphology
- Sciences of Qur’an
- Sciences of Hadith

A Method:

Dr. ‘Abdu al-Rahman Hijazi told me, “Many years ago, if a person wanted to enter al-Azhar, he would have to memorize the Qur’an. Then, while in secondary school, he would study one of the basic books in each subject (it was commendable for a young child to memorize one from each subject) in preparation for entering the high school system.

Reflections of an Aspiring Student of Knowledge

by Alaa Suliman

“One of the ways to acquire proper akhlaq (character) and adab (manners) is to seek knowledge,” our teacher told us. “To seek knowledge with a scholar who has studied with someone.”

Last night, our teacher shared that advice before we started our weekly fiqh (Islamic law) class. He then shared a story with us.

“My first teacher was an ocean of knowledge, may Allah protect him. One time, while I was studying with him in the masjid, he told me to wait for him. I sat there and waited for him from `asr (late afternoon) prayer till maghrib (sunset prayer). He then came back and told me: today you learned a lesson which you can never learn in books. After that, he told me to leave.”

Reflecting on what our teacher said, along with the story he shared, I can't help but realize how and why we, as students of knowledge wannabes, fall into many debates and useless arguments. Most of our scholars (if not all) have studied under knowledgeable shayukh (spiritual leaders) who disciplined them and taught them manners and adab before they taught them any Islamic science. They understood very well that their sincerity, humbleness, and down-to-earth attitude with fellow Muslims and everyone was far more important than memorizing volumes of books. However, they weren't served these beautiful manners on a golden plate; rather, they went trough a rigorous process of discipline, challenge and self-evaluation. While they were memorizing the Qur'an and Sahih Bukhari, they trained their hearts and minds and rectified things within. And because Allah (swt) helped them to do that (and much more), they are now able to deal with our communities. They are able to have respectful discussions and debates with those who disagree with them. They are able to handle criticism and slander and use it as a means to become better. Most importantly, they are able to help bring goodness to their community and humanity at large wa alhamdulilah (and all praise is to Allah).

Comparing the process our scholars and shayukh went through to how we should “pursue Islamic education” is quite interesting. Most of us here in the west refer to Wikipedia or “Shaykh Google” for our questions. Some of us exert more effort and sign up for classes at our local mosques or institutes. Some even take it to the next level and committed to study under a shaykh or student of knowledge. Alhamdulilah, we are all working hard and doing our best with the kind of resources we have. But to be quite honest, taking weekend classes or attending weekly halaqas (discussion circles) will never be the same as dedicating 4-5+ years of your life for studying. Learning from books will not always humble you and shock you with the reality that there's so much knowledge out there that you're ignorant of. Yet...

How many of us witnessed (or even worse, got involved in) endless debates about this opinion or that fatwa (religious ruling)? How many times have we doubted the credibility of our scholars (who dedicated most of their lives for this da`wah (call to Islam)) simply because we didn't feel comfortable with their opinion? What about when we debated our teachers and challenged them, lacking proper character? Or we started labeling people and groups and confirmed who's going to heaven and who's going to hell? The sad reality is that

all of these scenarios have happened countless times – and continue to happen.

The Prophet ﷺ said (roughly translated): “May Allah have mercy on he who knows his worth.” As students of knowledge wannabes, we need to first and foremost rectify our intentions and humble ourselves before Allah (swt). We need to remember that any knowledge Allah blessed us with is to be used for His service and humanity but not for debates and long online arguments. We need to make sure that while we take all these classes, we simultaneously work on our own self development and purification insha’Allah (God-willingly).

May Allah (swt) teach us that which benefits us. May He grant us the sincerity and the humbleness to seek knowledge and the wisdom to practice it. May He make us amongst the scholars, or at least bless us with their company so we may learn from their manners and benefit from their training.

May He reward all of our scholars, teachers and mentors, and grant them and their families beautiful patience. May we learn to respect, appreciate, love and make du`a’ (supplication) for them.

Allahuma ameen.

True Knowledge

Ten years ago, while in pharmacy school, I gave a quick presentation about the use of Over the Counter (OTC) smoking cessation products. It was an exercise in counseling patients on what is available in the market without a prescription to help them quit smoking. It was a very well put together presentation that garnered my classmates' applause. But the best part about it, according to my classmates, was the fact that everyone could see the outline of the pack of cigarettes in my front pocket. I was a smoker you see, yet I stood up in front of everyone and preached about the best way to help one quit this harmful habit and lead a healthy life.

Allah says in Surat Al-Jum`ah:

The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]. (Qur'an, 62:5)

In this verse, Allah (swt) talks about the Jews who did not utilize the knowledge given to them in the Torah nor did they apply it to their lives. He likens them to a donkey that carries on its back volumes of books; however, regardless of the knowledge these books contain, the donkey cannot make use of nor implement that knowledge in its life. Although this specific verse refers to the example of the Jews denying what was contained in their books about the coming of Prophet Mohammed ﷺ (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his message, we need to look at the greater message. The moral of this ayah is that mere possession of knowledge is not enough. We must implement knowledge in all aspects of our life or else it is, and we are, rendered useless. Simply put, when I gave that presentation, I was like a donkey. I had all the knowledge of the harms of smoking, how to best quit smoking and what help there is for me, yet I did not benefit from that knowledge. As one poet puts it:

Like camels in the desert dying of thirst/while it carries the water right on its back

The same can be said about knowing that prayer is the essential foundation of Islam but not praying, or having verses of the Qur'an memorized but not understanding

what they mean. Please don't get me wrong. The idea is not for every one of us to become a scholar of Islamic theology or jurisprudence or to become experts in every field of information; the idea is to understand and implement the knowledge that we do have in our lives. So let us ask ourselves, how many of us truly practice our knowledge? How many of us truly understand what it means to profess, five times a day, the Lordship of Allah? How many of us truly understand and implement the meanings of two verses that most of us have memorized?

"So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it,
And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it."

(Qur'an, 99:7-8)

Guidelines to Studying Islam Online

by Yusra Owais (Amatullah)

Within the last decade, Muslims have experienced a massive shift in the way they study Islam. In this advanced technological age, Islamic knowledge is available for mass absorption at the end of our fingertips through online. Twenty years ago, scholars and students had to search through their books. Today's online portal to Islamic knowledge has given students the chance to learn without leaving their homes. However, while our access has benefited us greatly, it also comes with its own pitfalls.

Online Learning: A Reality Check

Many Muslims do not realize that studying Islam through the internet requires a lot of self-discipline. Not only do you have to sit in front of a computer (a big distraction), online students are not accountable to anyone but themselves. Those who are interested in

beginning a course online need to figure out *why* they are willing to spend this time learning and what they wish to achieve out of it. If students do not have their intentions ironed out and their drive ready to go, they will not have the self-discipline needed to move forward properly. Studying Islam online is not the best method for everyone, so it is up to each student to prepare themselves before they commit to a program.

The most important thing students should know is that knowledge is a means, not the goal. Knowledge is a means for us to gain *Jannah* (Paradise), and this is how we should view it. It is also important for us as students to remember that knowledge is gained in stages. One of the righteous predecessors said, “Whoever gains knowledge all at once will lose it all at once!” Gaining knowledge is a gradual build-up which takes years. In fact some of the scholars viewed seeking knowledge as a lifelong commitment. Abdullah ibn Mubarak (*rahimahullah*) was asked, “How long will you seek knowledge?” His response was, “Until I die, for probably I have not yet learned the things that will benefit me most.” Going through the stages of knowledge also requires patience and a very high commitment level to remain consistent. As online students are not accountable to anyone but themselves,

they require even more patience and commitment than students who study “live.”

It is very easy to commit to online programs because of the initial hype it draws. After a few classes, the number of students slowly starts to dwindle. This initial phase is separating the committed students – those who have the self-discipline to study online – from those students who weren’t as serious or realized online studies was not for them. Students who are starting to take online classes should internalize the fact that they will be tested during these first few classes to see if they are able to commit.

The biggest drawback to studying online is the lack of interaction with a teacher. In many of the books on seeking knowledge, the longest chapter is how a student should behave with their teacher. A teacher is not only the source of knowledge, but also the source of manners. It is important for students who study online to focus on improving their character since they lack valuable interaction with the teacher face-to-face. It is said that knowledge is a tool that needs manners to make it run. The best way for students in online programs to learn manners and character is to read books and listen to lectures on the character of the

Prophet ﷺ, the Companions and the lives of the scholars. Remember that knowledge and manners go hand in hand, and without manners, your knowledge will not take you far.

Etiquette for the Modern Student of Knowledge

There are countless books written on the etiquette of seeking knowledge; however much is not applicable to us in the West because we live in a different time. For most of us, we do not study at the feet of scholars, or have daily lessons in the *masajid*. Due to our different circumstances, we should ‘modernize’ some of the etiquette of the students of knowledge to be applicable for us now.

Netiquette

- **Punctuality.** We should give knowledge the respect that it is due.
- **Complete focus.** One of the biggest challenges for online students is focusing during their lesson and not distracting themselves with chatting, browsing and reading websites.

- **Respecting your teacher.** Respect for teachers is hard when you are not facing them. The student does not think about the time and effort the teacher put into preparing their lesson because it is online. Respect your teacher's time and efforts.
- **Dress to impress.** If we were attending a live class, we would dress in a presentable manner. Although no one can see us at our computer, we should still look presentable because it affects how we revere the knowledge we're seeking.
- **Stay in contact with your teacher.** This could be through emails, discussion forums or interacting in class.
- **Do not record without permission.** Students should take permission from their teacher about recording classes, even if they are not sharing it with others.
- **Giving your online studies the same importance you give to “live” classes.** Since our online classes are in the comfort of our own homes, it is very easy to forget that we are in a serious commitment. We should treat it as so and not as a marginal past time.

Students should have the intention of starting and finishing their classes.

- **Have patience with what you already know.** In a lesson you may get distracted if you are devaluing a particular part of the lesson. When your teacher covers something you've already learned, think of the benefit of repetition and be humble: you always need more knowledge. This repetition will only make you more grounded in what you already know.

There is much more to be said about netiquette, but these are some of the main points for online students.

Tips to Maximizing Your Online Learning Experience

- Have a “study buddy.” This will increase your motivation and keep you accountable. This person can also share notes with you if you happen to miss a session.
- Close all tabs or websites that are not related to your class until it is over. If you find this hard to do, then move the computer away from you or block all other programs.

- Take notes on paper if you know the computer will be a distraction for you.
- Do not sit on your bed or a couch when you are learning. Sit at a desk, which will help you focus more in a study-like environment.
- Prepare yourself for class like you would for a “live” class. Have your pencils/notebook ready, turn off your cell phone, and go to a quiet area.
- Keep a journal of “gems” of what you have learned to keep yourself motivated.
- Teach your family or roommates what you have learned after each session, even if it’s only one thing.
- Time management. Balance your time studying online and other life commitments to make sure you are giving each its due rights (*huquq*).
- Review and implement what you have learned before your next class. It is important to make sure you have enough time to understand, review and apply what you’re learning.

- Make *du`a'* that Allah benefits you through your knowledge and allows you to complete your program/classes.

Insha'Allah this basic overview will help both of us maximize our online Islamic studies.

Blessings of Seeking Knowledge

by Kanika Aggarwal

“Knowledge is power.”

How many times in our lives have we heard this phrase? How many times have our parents, teachers, elders stated this same thing over and over again? This quote by Sir Francis Bacon emphasizes that when you have knowledge, you have authority. It alludes to the fact that there is something about acquiring knowledge that gives you a controlling influence. But more importantly, this is a non-Muslim phrase which has only been around since 1597.

The teachings of religion of Islam came to us well over 1400 years ago. From the beginning of revelation, there was an emphasis on seeking and acquiring knowledge. I remind you that the first words of revelation were “Read!”

۱ ﴿أَقِرْأُ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ﴾

“Recite in the name of your Lord who created.”
[Qur'an, 96:1]

The intention of this article is not so much to remind you the importance of seeking knowledge. It is assumed that we know as Muslims that we have been commanded to seek knowledge.

The quest for knowledge is a compulsion on every Muslim. [Hadith Hassan]

Note: The knowledge referred to above is knowledge in deen because that is the only knowledge that is *wajib* (compulsory).

The main goal of this article is to motivate you to continue to seek Islamic knowledge, and to encourage you to take joy and pride in doing this act of worship, because we can understand from various Qur'anic statements and *ahadith* (statements of the Prophet ﷺ) that there are definite returns for these efforts in the form of rewards and blessings from Allah.

Raised Status and Rank

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا
يَفْسَحَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ أَنْشُرُوا فَانْشُرُوا يَرْفَعَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

(11)

“Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees.”
[Qur'an, 58:11]

Let us take a hypothetical scenario where you work for a reputable company. One day your boss entices you with a promotion upon completion of a certain project under your lead. I guarantee you would put your heart and soul into getting that promotion. Well, Allah wants to give you a promotion, not just in this *dunya* but in *Jannah* (Paradise)! Scholars agree that the term “high ranks” in this statement refers to bounties in this world and the Hereafter. Just because the promises of *Jannah* are intangible at the moment should not allow us to ignore such a huge blessing of seeking knowledge. We have to believe in the *ayat* (verses, signs) of our Lord.

Superiority over all beings

“And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, ‘Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.’ He said, ‘O Adam, inform them of their names.’ And when he had informed them of their names, He said, ‘Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed.’ And [mention] when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam'; so they prostrated...” [Qur'an, 2:31-34].

When Allah taught Adam (*`alayhi assalam* - peace be upon him) the names of all things, He asked the angels and Iblis (who had reached the level of angels) to prostrate to Adam (as). I remind you that angels are pure creations of Allah. They are made of light, are in complete obedience to Him and are doing *tasbih* (glorifying Allah) at all times. Such a pure creation of Allah was commanded to show respect to our ancestor Adam (as), who was made of clay and was prone to sinning. This prostration was performed as a form of respect and took place based on one and only one factor: knowledge.

Even in this *dunya*, the way to gain superiority over other human beings is through knowledge – you get a better income, you enjoy a more luxurious lifestyle, you have a higher reputation in the society. But to be higher in front of Allah you have to be knowledgeable in your deen, and this is how you will truly become superior to all other creations of Allah.

Scholars who truly understand the Qur'an

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا

الْعَالِمُونَ



"And these examples We present to the people, but none will understand them except those of knowledge."

[Qur'an, 29:43]

Scholars agree that this *ayah* is actually referring to all people of knowledge (and not just the scholars). People of knowledge who read, learn, and understand the Qur'an are the ones who truly comprehend the parables it contains. The parables mentioned in the Qur'an are important in telling us which actions are harmful to our *akhira* (Hereafter) and hence should be avoided.

They also guide us in which actions are more rewarding than others, so that we can strive to do them.

Sign of Allah's love for a person

"Whosoever Allah wishes good for, He gives him understanding (*fiqh*) of the Religion." (Bukhari and Muslim)

As children we are always looking for signs of love from our parents. If a parent buys gifts for their child, the child is assured that their parents love them. Love and compassion from parents makes a child feel happy and special. Allah tells us through the Prophet ﷺ that if He loves us, He gives us understanding of the religion of Islam. The difference is that the love of Allah is far greater than anybody else's love. Acquiring the love of Allah is the ultimate goal of this life.

However, this love does not come without striving, trying hard and putting in a lot of effort. You have to earn the love of Allah by striving to gain Islamic knowledge - even if there are not many resources around you, even if the knowledge seems hard to retain, even if there are many distractions around you.

Statement of Imam Shafi'i

"After the obligatory deeds, nothing is more beloved to Allah than studying knowledge."

While this statement holds the obvious meaning of how much Allah loves for a person to seek Islamic knowledge, it also has a much deeper implication. The process starts off by gaining knowledge that is absolutely essential for a Muslim to perform their obligatory deeds. Once a person gets accustomed to performing obligatory deeds and does not find them burdensome, then because of the impact of knowledge, they will automatically do acts that are more than obligatory.

Let us take an example of a sister who finds it hard to pray two *sunnah rakat* (units of prayer) at the time of *fajr*. She skips the *sunnah rakat*, prays the obligatory units quickly, and jumps back into bed. She takes a class where she learns of the great blessings of praying the *sunnah* units off *fajr* prayer. After gaining knowledge, she makes it a point not to miss her *sunnah* units of prayer.

Hadith of Abu Darda

“If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge, the inhabitants of the heavens and the Earth and the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man.

The superiority of the learned man over the worshipper is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes a big fortune.” [Abu Dawud]

This hadith outlines multiple blessings of seeking knowledge, but we will concentrate on two main benefits. The two main benefits of treading on the path of knowledge are the protection of angels and the *du'a* of Allah's creatures. A possible meaning can be that angels provide protection in two ways: they lower their wings for a student of knowledge (i.e. they allow the student of knowledge to walk over their wings, much like a red carpet), and out of respect for the student of knowledge, they stop flying until the student has passed them. *Allahu Akbar!* Despite the purity of the

angels, knowledge allows us to gain a higher rank than them in the eyes of Allah!

The inhabitants of the heavens and the earth make *du'a* for the student of knowledge. This includes the *du'a* of the angels and all other creatures on this earth, such as ants and all the fish in the sea. This is a great honor for children of Adam (as)! Striving for knowledge is one of the best deeds we can do to attain mercy of Allah.

Statement of Ibn Hazm (may Allah be pleased with him)

“If the learned ponders how the hours he spent learning saved him from the humiliation of being dominated by the ignorant and from the distress of having no access to the facts, and how those hours provided him with the joy of discovering that which is hidden from others, he would excel in praising Allah, the exalted, full of majesty, and would be more pleased with the knowledge he has and would deepen his desire to increase his knowledge.”

This is a beautiful statement by Ibn Hazm (ra). The direct implications of his statement are obvious.

Possession of knowledge will save us from the humiliation of being dominated by the commands of ignorant people. Moreover, possession of knowledge will save us from the distress of having no access to reliable and authentic information. Furthermore, possession of knowledge will give us the joy of knowing that which others do not know. Correct knowledge allows us to worship our Lord in a better manner, a manner which pleases Him. Once we have the knowledge, we will become even more pleased with its advantages and benefits in our lives. This would deepen our desire to gain more knowledge. It is a sweet yet vicious cycle, which takes initial effort and indulgence, but once we taste the sweetness of knowledge, we become addicted!

Are you satisfied?

“Two persons are never satisfied, one who is seeking knowledge, and the other who is seeking the world.”

(Note: there is a disagreement about the above statement. Some say this is a *hadith*, and some say it is a statement of Ali (ra). Either way, we concern ourselves with the beneficial message of this statement.)

We have a choice in this world. We can either get addicted to this *dunya*, which we will leave after 60-80 years of life along with everything in it, or we can get addicted to seeking knowledge, which will reap heavy rewards on the Day of Judgement. The path of this *dunya* leads us away from Allah, and the path of knowledge leads us towards Allah. Likewise, the path of this *dunya* destroys our Hereafter, and the path of knowledge secures our Hereafter. The choice is entirely ours.

When should you be jealous of others ?

“No one should be jealous of anything except two people - a man whom Allah has blessed with knowledge and he teaches it; and a man who has money and he spends it in the sake of Allah.” (Bukhari)

This *hadith* alludes to the etiquettes of seeking knowledge. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is saying we should not get envious of others for anything other than two things, one of them being knowledge. Observing other people who have knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunnah should make us feel envious; the idea is to use this feeling as a motivation to gain knowledge. This *hadith* does not imply that we question Allah's

decree as to why He made the other person knowledgeable and why we were not given similar knowledge. Instead, we should ask Allah to make us learned in our deen.

فَتَعَلَّمَ اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْءَانِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَى
إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ، وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

١١٤

“My Lord, increase me in knowledge.” [Qur'an, 20:114]

Conclusion

I hope this article has served as a motivation to continue seeking knowledge because of the numerous benefits and blessings associated with it. Seeking knowledge will help us appreciate our deen, better our connection with Allah, and allow us to find solutions to our problems from the Quran and sunnah to simplify our lives.

Islamic Scholarship Funds

by Andrew Booso

I was recently privy to the beginnings of a project to establish a scholarship fund for seekers of knowledge. In particular, there was the sentiment of financially facilitating the path of study for those who have the potential to make relevant the eternal religious truths in a contemporary manner, which is practical as well as intellectual. This project was heart-warming because it acknowledged, and sought to rectify, the gaping challenge facing the Muslims in England with regards to proficient and engaging knowledge. On the other hand, it was also lamentable that the Muslims of England had as yet not produced one comprehensive and productive scholarship fund, despite being quite active in being present, producing well-furnished masjids with almost continuous extensions (usually only applicable to the two Eid celebrations) and publishing a wide variety of well-produced works since the 1970's. Now understanding the general vacuum is different to then

specifying the details of a programme that will correct the problem as well as some of the failings of previous attempts, *insha'Allah*.

The need to establish a new scholarship fund is because we have, in England, underestimated scholarly excellence and its necessity for the flowering of a vibrant and true Islamic culture. This has led to us not establishing enriched and focused schemes of funding. Moreover, our failure with regards to knowledge has been to confuse ‘signs of scholarship’ with ‘great scholarship’; thus exaggerating returning students and neglecting leading scholars.

To initiate a new direction in this regard, we must layout clear principles for achieving our objective. The pure Islamic ‘philosophy’ of *usul al-fiqh*, or legal methodology, should provide the framework in which we can set targets and judge cases. Indeed, the application of sound jurisprudential principles is what allows us to arrive at the ‘*fiqh* of scholarship funds’, after passing through the valleys – to borrow from Shaykh Yusuf Qaradawi – of the ‘*fiqh* of balances (*muwazanat*)’ and the ‘*fiqh* of priorities (*awlawiyyat*)’. Shaykh Qaradawi details this path in his *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*. Yet we can summarize

the path as the ‘putting of everything in its right place according to the Sacred Law’. Consequently – again using Qaradawi – we can arrive at placing virtuous, as opposed to ambivalent or rejected, cases in various categories: 1) *daruriyya* (necessary); 2) *hajiyya* (needed); or 3) *tahsiniyya*(dignifying).

The following can be rightly considered necessary pursuits of learning:

- Seeking comprehensive obligatory knowledge for disseminating, through translations and verbal class-based instruction, in one’s community where there is a lack thereof. This can include the pursuit of theological, legal and spiritual sciences.
- After mastering the legal sciences, seeking extensive training at the hands of those skilled to issue legal rulings (*muftis*), so that one can perform the same task for one’s community after attaining similar mastery that is recognized by one’s teachers. [Here I mean, ideally, much more than just a mere customary one or two year *takhassus*, or Masters level specialisation, so popular in dar al-ulums at present – and surprisingly called ‘mufti’ courses. Nevertheless, a *takhassus* scholarship could be

necessary in order to improve a community towards the desired end state.]

- It might even mean providing the funding means for a seasoned scholar from the Muslim world to learn English.

The needed category would include those pursuits similar to the above but to a degree less than necessary, perhaps due to some people already performing such obligatory tasks, but their instruction would be better served through competent support.

The dignifying category would be one that includes the praiseworthy pursuit of Islamic knowledge, but in an instance where the duty that one wants to accomplish for one's community is already being fulfilled. For instance, someone living in a community with teachers competent to teach the four pillars of the law would not be a necessary or needed case to go and study *Nur al-idah*. Likewise, it would not be necessary or needed for someone to want to learn and then translate *Umdat as-salik* (reliance of the traveller). Furthermore, a community that has numerous people teaching something like the Madina Arabic books does not need to provide a scholarship for someone to study Arabic for

a year abroad in order to then return and just teach these same books.

Now we should consider the qualities that a prospective scholarship student should have, and the following is a guide:

Proven Intelligence

- Now, of course, potential does not necessarily lead to fulfillment of that potential. Success (*tawfiq*) is only from God, so achievement of a goal cannot be stipulated prior to the undertaking of a task.

Proven Diligence

- One can have potential but not have the attitude to succeed.

Exhausted Local Means

- This means that someone wanting to study Arabic or the Islamic sciences should have drained all the benefit they can from those means accessible to them. This will obviously differ for each person. However, national resources should perhaps be explored

before travels abroad. Moreover, the internet has opened up further means towards gaining knowledge before seeking to travel abroad. The importance of this criteria is to ensure that the seeker has a maturity that has outgrown a wholly romantic attitude towards knowledge. In addition, a person who exemplifies this experience is one who will be better placed to benefit from the journey abroad, which can be very expensive and challenging.

A Focused Outlook and Goal

- Any applicant must display a penetrative vision that allows them to be able to take a scholarship and do more than just accomplish some formal study. With all due respect, since the 1990's many groups have stressed the importance of authentic knowledge and have had many journeys for study, but have we really built upon the foundations of the early 1990's? To answer, it really is a mixed affair.

In the realm of law – despite differing with certain legal pronouncements – one would be severely constrained to say that the *Reliance of the Traveller* has even been equalled by Hanafis, Malikis or Salafis (whether 'Egyptian light' or 'Saudi heavy') in terms

of comprehensiveness and professionalism, and the Reliance received its revised edition in 1994! However, the Shafi'is, at the same time, haven't progressed the essentialist nature of the Reliance.

Nevertheless, there are numerous successes and furthering of literature since then. However, the neglect of law is indicative of a lack of prioritization, which does not make superfluous the strides made in presenting history (such as Ali Sallabi's works or Ramadan Buti's *Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography*) or works of ethics (such as Ibn Rajab's *Compendium*, Taqi 'Uthmani's *Discourses on the Islamic Way of Life* or Jamaal Zarabozo's *Commentary on the Forty Hadith*) or the monumental exegesis works of the Qur'an (such as Muhammad Shafi'i's *Ma'ariful-Qur'an* and Muhammad Aashiq Illahi's *Illuminating Discourses on the Noble Qur'an*). Ultimately, these scholarships will, for the foreseeable future, operate under constrained finances, therefore students seeking aid would be expected to show a little more than the rest, so as to push their application further ahead.

The fund will need the gathering of funds through publicity and events. These events should be about the

importance of knowledge and why it is crucial to contribute generously. In *Priorities*, Shaykh Qaradawi bemoans the lack of prioritization in ‘many groups of the Islamic Awakening’ and the ‘Muslims in general’. He then makes the startling point that he sees

“Millions going to ‘Umra every year in Ramadan and other months, and others making Hajj for the tenth or even twentieth time. If they saved the money they spent on these nawafil [optional acts of worship], they would accumulate thousands of millions of dollars. We have been running around for many years trying to collect one thousand million dollars for an Islamic philanthropic institution, but have not collected a tenth, even one twentieth or one thirtieth of that amount.”

Therefore we must question where we send our charitable money, and distinguish between the ‘virtuous’ and the ‘better’. We must also realise the need to bequeath people to posterity and not largely empty buildings. Now to start towards rearing great individuals, one must lay the foundations of producing great teachers before one lavishly adorns a prayer hall. Ali Sallabi – in Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih after discussing the crucial relationship between the teacher Shaykh Shamsuddin upon his student Muhammad al-

Fatih – states that there has been no ‘godly leader’ nor ‘brave liberator’ except ‘there is a group of pious scholars around him to teach and guide him’, including Qadi Fadil with Salahuddin Ayyubi. Without seeking to produce a scholarly class to provide profound religious instruction, one can only wonder at the future plight of the general Muslim populace in England. One sad reflection upon a negative future is that Muslims in England have a woeful civil record when they have been far from Islamic teachings – and the prisons bear testimony to this.

In conclusion, a scholarship fund should be well resourced by the community, and the fund itself should be responsible in delivering funds in order of the most worthy applicants. Moreover, students and scholars should be allowed to freely seek knowledge, and follow its paths as they are guided. How tragic that a student only intend to ever imitate his teachers, without having the high aspiration (*himma*) to become men as they see their teachers as men. The only boundaries set for an applicant must be that they are advised – like any believer – to adhere to the orthodox path of *Ahl as-Sunnah*; and not that they are required to strengthen any little grouping that seeks to monopolize the wide-expanses of this group whose blessing has been

pronounced upon the tongue of the best of all creation, our Master Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him). Our teacher Shaykh Akram Nadwi – may God bless him and his family – mentioned how he ‘studied very hard’ and ‘would debate’ his ‘teachers and classmates’; and this advice is important. However, I would caution a student to know their place, i.e. not to parrot some ‘methodology’ gained in their university days and then blindly debate on that basis with their teachers; and then to just return as a more Arabised version of their original case; rather, their debating should be tempered by well informed gradualism (i.e. being true to one’s self and knowing one’s rank), sincerity and the principles of the Sunni method. The door has been presented to us – how many seek to open it, by the grace of God?

May God bless Abdullah al-Hasan and the Spring Foundation, and make the latter scholarship fund a source of guidance and success. *Amin.*

A True Talib ul-'Ilm (Student of Sacred Knowledge)

By Shaykh Abdul Fattah Abu Ghuddah | Translated by
Shazia Ahmad

...And here [we will mention] another account from among the most extraordinary of narratives, which occurred with an Andalusian scholar when he traveled from al-Andalus to the East. He traveled this great distance walking on his two legs [without the help of a horse or camel on which to ride] in order to meet with an imam from among the [great] imams and to acquire knowledge from him. When he arrived there he found that the imam had been put under house arrest and banned from teaching the people. In spite of this, by utilizing some secretive and artful means, the Andalusian scholar was able to learn from him... And history is replete with such strange and interesting occurrences...

....His name was Abu Abd ar-Rahman Baqiyy bin Makhlad Al-Andalusi al-Hafidh. He was born in the year 201 [after the Hijra] and passed away in the year 276, may Allah have mercy on him. He traveled to

Baghdad by foot when he was about twenty years of age, and his deepest and most heart-felt desire was to meet with Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal and to study with him.

It is reported that he said:

“When I came close to Baghdad, the news reached me of the difficult trials that had encircled Ahmad bin Hanbal, and that meeting and communicating with him had been made prohibited. I was greatly grieved by this news. I lodged where I was, and the first thing I did after renting out a room for myself was go to the great masjid [of Baghdad]. I wanted to sit in the lessons there and hear what was being studied therein.

I came across a noble gathering for knowledge [at the masjid], in which a man was teaching about narrators of the hadith, elucidating upon the weaknesses of some narrators and the strength of others. I asked someone sitting next to me, ‘Who is that?’ and he replied, ‘That is Yahya bin Ma’een.’

I saw that a place had opened up [in the gathering] close to the teacher, so I moved to fill it and said to him, ‘Ya Aba Zakariyya, may Allah have mercy on you. [I am a]

stranger [among you], whose home is in a far distant place. I have some questions, so do not disdain me.' He said to me, 'Speak.' So I asked him about some of the narrators of ahadith I had met, and he praised some of them for their excellence, and warned about the weaknesses in others. I asked him a question about Hisham bin Ammar, and I had asked and gained a lot of knowledge from him [...] when the people of the gathering called out, 'That's enough for you, may Allah have mercy on you! Others have questions too!'

Finally, as I was standing up [to leave], I said, "Can you inform me about one other person: What about Ahmad bin Hanbal?"

Yahya ibn Ma'een looked at me astounded, and said, 'Can such as us judge a person like Ahmad bin Hanbal! He is the Imam of the Muslims, the best among them and the most honorable of them."

I left the masjid and asked to be directed to the home of Imam Ahmad. I knocked on his door, and he answered it. I said, "Ya Aba Abdillah, I am a stranger from a far distant place, and this is my first time entering upon this land. I am a student of hadith and one who is bound to the Sunnah. I made this journey only to meet you."

He said, “Enter from the alleyway to the side, and let no eye fall upon you.”

He then said to me, “Where is your home?” I said, “The distant west.” He asked, “Africa?” I said, “Further than that. I would have to travel across the sea to get from my home to Africa. It is al-Andalus.”

He said, “Your home is indeed a great distance from here. And there is nothing more beloved to me than to help someone like you attain what you are seeking, but for that I am being tried with this difficulty, which you may already be aware of...”

I replied, “Indeed the news reached me as I was approaching the city and coming towards you... Ya Aba Abdillah, this is my first time in this land, and I am unknown to its people. If you allow me, I will come to you each day in the garb of a beggar, and I will speak the way that they speak, and you can come to the door. If you narrate to me only one hadith each day [in this way], it would suffice me.”

He agreed, on the condition that I did not attend the gatherings of knowledge and did not meet with the

[local] scholars of hadith [so that I would remain unknown among the people].

So I would carry a walking stick in my hand and wrap an old rag around my head, and I would hide my papers and writing instruments in my sleeve, and I would go to his door and call out, “[Give in charity] for the reward of Allah, may Allah have mercy on you!” as the other beggars there used to do. He would come out and close the door behind him, and narrate to me two ahadith or three or sometimes more, until I had collected about three hundred ahadith in this way.

I remained constant in doing this until the ruler who was trying Imam Ahmad died, and in his place came someone who adhered to the madhab of the Sunnah. Imam Ahmad then returned to his teaching and his name became renowned, and he became honored and loved among the people. His rank was elevated, and many people flocked to him to study.

He would always remember my perseverance in seeking to learn from him. When I would attend his lessons he would make room for me to sit close to him, and he would say to the other students, ‘This is someone who has earned the title of Talib ul-‘Ilm!’ and

he would tell them my story. He would narrate hadith to me, and I would recite them to him.

One day I became ill, and I was absent from his classes for some time. He asked [the other students] about me and when he heard that I was ill he rose immediately to visit me, and the students followed. I was laying down in the room which I rented, a [cheap] woolen blanket beneath me, a thin cloth covering me, my books near my head [so that I could study laying down].

The lodging literally shook with the sound of many people [entering], and I heard them say 'That's him over there...' [...] The lodge-keeper rushed to me, saying 'Ya Abd ar-Rahman, Abu Abdullah Ahmad bin Hanbal, Imam of the Muslims, has come to visit you!'

The Imam entered my room and sat at my bedside, and the lodging filled up with his students. It wasn't large enough to fit all of them and a group of them had to remain standing, all of them with pens in hand. Imam Ahmad said to me, "Ya Abd ar-Rahman, have glad tidings of reward from Allah. In days of health we often fail to reflect upon illness, and in days of illness we don't remember our health. I ask that Allah raise you to good health and wellbeing, and may He touch you with

His right hand in healing.” And I saw every pen in the room moving to write down his words.

He left. The workers of my lodge were very kind to me after that, and were constantly in my service, one of them bringing me a mat to lay on, another bringing a good blanket and wholesome food for me to eat. They treated me better than family because such a righteous person came to visit me...”

He passed away in the year 276 [after Hijra] in al-Andalus. May Allah have mercy on him.

[...] His student Abu Abdul Malik Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Qurtubi said of him: ‘Baqiyy bin Makhlad was tall, strong, and had tough endurance in walking. I never saw him on a ride, ever. He was humble and unpretentious, and would always attend the funeral prayer.’

How excellent was his patience and his passion for sacred knowledge, and how beautiful his struggle to attain and collect it!

An excerpt from the book “Safahaat min Sabr al-Ulama”
[Glimpses of the Perseverance of the Scholars]

The Superiority of knowledge and Imam al-Shatibi's Question (may Allah have mercy upon him)

By Sh. Abdul Fatah Abu Ghuda (may Allah have mercy upon him) | Translated by Suhaib Webb

Commentary on Risalatul Mustarshiden of Imam Al-Muhasibi (may Allah have mercy upon him)

The Superiority of knowledge

Imam Al-Shatibi (may Allah have mercy on him) wrote a letter to Abi 'Abdillah Muhammad bin 'Ubad Al-Nafzi (may Allah have mercy on him) the preacher of Jam'I Al-Qayrawin (the main mosque and center of learning in Qayrawin) in the city of Fez and the sheikh of the people of tazkiyah of his day. The letter contained an important question surrounding an issue that arose in Granada and served as a cause of discussion and disagreement amongst the scholars.

The Question: from al-Shatibi (may Allah have mercy upon him)

“Is it incumbent upon the one traversing the spiritual path to Allah to take a sheikh of a tariqah and tarbiyah and to travel upon his hands? Or is it allowable to take this path by seeking knowledge and taking from the people of knowledge without having a sheikh of a tariqah?”

The Answer: (Two Types of Teachers)

“For the one traversing the path towards Allah there are two types of sheikhs:

- 1) Sheikhs of Tariqahs and Tarbiyah (Sufi Path)
- 2) Sheikhs of knowledge who do not specify a program of tarbiyah and spiritual training

The Sheikh of Tarbiyah is not a necessity for every seeker. However, the one who needs such a sheikh is he who has a limited intellect and disobedient soul. As for the one who possesses an ample intellect and submissive character, then it is not incumbent on him to take such a sheikh. However, what is an obligation on every seeker is to take a sheikh who will teach him and educate him

The sheikh of tarbiyah is incumbent upon those mentioned earlier. This is due to the thick veils which cover their souls. Thus, they could not be left alone to raise them (the veils), nor correct them without the aide of such a sheikh who can train and nurture them. Their likeness is as one who suffers from a delicate ailment that only an intelligent physician could cure with a powerful remedy.

As for those who are free from the obligation to take a sheikh of tarbiyah it is due to their sound intellects and obedient souls. These things (qualities) free them from such a sheikh. Their actions are made sound by the knowledge they learn and the things they take from the people of knowledge and understanding, and this person, by Allah's will, will reach (his goal). Thus, there is no need to fear for him from any harm on his way (to Allah swt).

Historical Background

The reliance on a sheikh of tarbiyah is something that came from the latter scholars of tasawuf, and the reliance on a person of knowledge (for one's training) was the way of the first from amongst them (the early scholars). This is apparent from their writings and

compilations. For example, the works of al-Muhasibi (may Allah have mercy upon him) and Abu Talib al-Maki (may Allah have mercy upon him) and others show that they did not ascribe to a sheikh of tarbiyah the way the latter one's did. They (the earlier people of tazkiyah) would mention the fundamentals and branches of knowledge especially Sheikh Abu Talib, however, their absence of ascribing to a certain sheikh is a proof that such a sheikh was not incumbent, nor a condition, for those seeking Allah in their time.

The Way of The First Generations: Knowledge and Brotherhood

And this way of traveling to Allah, this was the program of the majority and represents the way of the salaf and the earlier generations. This is established by the fact that it has not been transmitted that they used to stick to a sheikh of tarbiyah, submit themselves to him and serve as his apprentice and student. However, theirs was only a time of the acquisition of knowledge and reform by spending time in good companionship and fraternal relations. Due to this, they experienced an amazing development which appeared on their inner and outer states. Thus, they traveled the lands and

stroved to meet with the friends of Allah, the scholars and those engrossed in servitude to the Divine.

The Superiority of Knowledge

As for the books of the people of tasawuf then they must be examined by the people of knowledge because their benefit is exclusively based on the trusted view that the author (of such books) is from the people of knowledge and cognizant (of Allah may He be exalted). And such an opinion can only arise from the people of knowledge, which one has entrusted his affairs to. Thus, if what appears beneficial from these texts agrees with the shari'ah, then it is sufficient. However, if that is not the case, then there is no way out except with the sheikh of knowledge and understanding who can clarify things. Thus, he (the seeker) has no other choice then to rely on a sheikh of knowledge."

End of the Letter

Islamic Education: Reformation or Transformation?

By Abu Nusaybah

Allah instructs us in the Qur'an to make du'a' (supplication) for an increase in knowledge. We read and hear many examples of the benefits, virtue, and honor of seeking knowledge. Typically we envision those engaging in such a process to be struggling in a far off land, and sometimes that is the case. Far too seldom do we apply this to our children, who spend approximately six hours learning every day.

Our children face a variety of challenges in that process. In public schools the learning process is often done without any connection to an Islamic worldview, and many times promotes an atheistic one. We tend to think the remedy to that challenge is placing our children in private Islamic schools. Interestingly however, those schools often use the same textbooks for the majority of the school day and tack on an additional hour of Islamic Studies each day. This can create a dichotomy in the minds of our children whereby the perspective of most

of the curriculum content may conflict with the Islamic one.

It may come as a surprise to hear, but to date, there is no complete Islamic curriculum in the English language. Dr. Bilal Philips recently told me that he has been working and pushing for this for fourteen years, yet very little has materialized. That is not to say that nothing has been done. Several complete Islamic Studies programs have been developed, and they are being used widely¹. Dr. Dawud Tauhidi – may Allah have mercy on him – made significant progress with the Tarbiyah Project. Dr. Nadeem Memon founded the Islamic Teacher Education Program in Canada. Those are just a few examples.

It might seem that the process of fixing the education problem is relatively simple: surely teachers in Islamic schools can simply adapt the content that runs counter to the Islamic worldview. This preventative method might work, however it places a great burden on teachers by requiring them to edit and adjust content on a daily basis. Another approach is to question the

¹ Though author is correct in claiming that there is no curriculum designed to date in English which is entirely Islamic in its nature including secular or contemporary subjects, many resources have started to emerge now which can sufficiently fulfill the requirements. One such example is works by AFAQ Foundation Pakistan. From Islamic Studies point of view, some considerable works include Dr. Bilal Philips' series for Islamic schools, Sheikh Feizal Chothia's various series, Dar us Salam's school curriculum series and others. Some of these books can be accessed from <http://www.australianislamiclibrary.org/teaching-skills1.html>

objective of education: why are we learning? One wisdom behind learning is that we have been created only to worship Allah, and that ought to be central to our learning process. In light of this, deleting troubling content from secular books will not achieve this aim. In order to do so, we need to rethink our approach.

One methodology, as developed by the Open Islamic Curriculum project, is to create a thematic curriculum that revolves entirely around Islam. No content is lost in the process; all the required subjects are taught within a framework of Islamic themes. The content is also integrated across subjects, such that the Islamic theme, for example Ramadan, continues to be reinforced throughout the school day and across all the subjects. Alhamdulilah (all praise and thanks belongs to God) the objective of that effort is to create materials that reinforce and build the Islamic worldview throughout the school day. And, to offer those materials freely in a modular way so that teachers can integrate whatever lessons, units, or subjects they need.

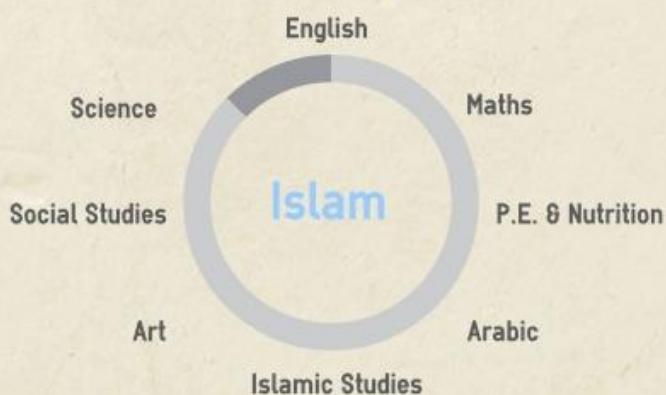
The Open Islamic Curriculum project launched a few months ago and needs your help. What we need is your time. If you have lessons you've developed, please share them. If you can create lessons, sign up to volunteer. If you want to get involved in raising awareness about the

importance of Islamic Education, join the social media team. If you are from an IT background, help out with the website. Your ideas and time are welcome. We truly believe there is a great need to refine Islamic Education in our communities, and we also feel that this project will have immense benefits for students across the globe. Join us.



Islamic Education is viewed as something outside of everyday schooling

Isn't it time Islamic Education looked more like this?



Go to www.openislamiccurriculum.com to find out more about volunteering to help refine Islamic Education